**THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
AN ANALYSIS OF STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES,
OPPORTUNITIES, AND THREATS (SWOT)**

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Adventists has been gathering data to use in helping the Adventist church move into the future in

a manner that will maximize its mission to the world. For example, a world survey to determine

the status of the church in three major areas of objectives: (1) Quality of Personal and Church

Life, (2) Unity in the World Church, and (3) Growth of the Church. This report was presented to

the Annual Council of the church in 2002. Another example is "The Seventh-day Adventist

Church Faces the Future: A Forecasting Document," presented to the officers of the General

Conference in 2003.

In the spring of 2003, the commission employed the Institute of Church Ministry (ICM)

of the Theological Seminary at Andrews University to conduct a SWOT analysis among leaders

of the church in the world field. The plan was to request the presidents, executive secretaries,

and treasurers of each of the world divisions and of each of the world unions - as well as the

presidents of major colleges and universities and the chief executives of selected Adventist

hospitals - to complete a questionnaire that would reveal their views on the state of the church.

Given their positions of responsibility and the global nature of the sample, it was presumed that

their combined views would represent a fair picture of the present condition of the church.

The Questionnaire

A number of scholars trained in survey research along with large input from the Strategic

Planning Commission and General Conference officers developed an 81-question survey form.

The questions were divided into the four areas symbolized by SWOT. The area of *Strengths*

relates to matters concerning resources and programs that are essentially internal to the church and was comprised of 30 questions.

Weaknesses with 28 questions focuses on matters concerning resources and programs that are essentially internal to the church. *Opportunities* is comprised of 11 questions investigating external situations facing the church. Finally, *Threats* concerns external problems confronting the church.

Each question is a statement appropriate to one of the four areas of SWOT to which the respondents rate on a 1 to 5 scale. The number 1 indicates that the situation is not very important or not much of a concern while 5 means it is most important or most crucial or presents the greatest danger. A copy of the questionnaire is attached to this report.

Data Collecting

The questionnaire, along with a letter of request from Matthew Bediako, secretary of the General Conference, was mailed in July 2003 to the church leaders identified above. Surveys were sent to 408 individuals all over the world who were requested to return them directly to ICM. Leaders were also instructed that if they wished some of their departmental directors to complete the survey, they could make copies and have these extra people return them to ICM. No follow up was attempted for the extra copies since the respondents were anonymous, but 132 questionnaires were received from this group.

Securing the responses from such a widely-scattered sample proved to be extremely difficult. Mailings were originally sent in July of 2003, and data cut-off did not take place until April 1 of 2004. A reminder letter was mailed in November of 2003, and Elder Bediako sent another plea in January of 2004. In addition to these letters, constant contact and reminders were maintained through e-mail and FAX.

By April of 2004, 294 individuals had returned usable surveys. This represents a 72% return rate from the 408 sent out - a remarkable response in a project this wide-spread and complicated. However, if we add in the extra surveys, 426 were received or 104% return. This very positive response ensures confidence that the results do well represent the voice of the world wide church and validates the lengthy collection process. Below is a list of the sources of the 294 questionnaires:

1. Division Presidents   12

2. Division Secretaries   9

3. Division Treasurers   7

4. Union Presidents   73

5. Union Secretaries   72

6. Union Treasurers   59

7. Educational Institutions 36

8. Health Institutions   26

In addition to a break down by position, the following list displays the sources by divisions:

ECD   26

ESD   11

EUD   41

IAD   51

NAD   67

NSD   16

SAD   28

**SID	25**

**SPD	19**

**SSD	39**

**SUD	25**

**TED	50**

**WAD	27**

**UNIDENTIFIED	1**

The analysis, using the Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS), will include all 426 survey responses.

Findings

Each of the four areas was analyzed separately in two different ways. First, frequencies were calculated, and the combined percentages of those choosing options 4 and 5 (important and most important) were arranged in descending order for that SWOT area. Second, means for each question were calculated and again arranged in descending order within a given category. This supplies two ways of viewing the most important strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Printouts from both of these methods are attached to this report. However, inspection reveals that the two lists are generally in the same order with only slight variations. Therefore, the comments that follow will be based on the frequencies of those reporting "important" or "most important."

**Frequencies	Options 4 plus 5**

Question #	Question	Responses	Percent
Strengths			
5	Biblical basis for doctrines	394	92.49
2	Message of hope	393	92.25

8 A multi-cultural church	365	85.68
22 Guides for various age levels	363	85.21
30 Tithe-sharing plan	363	85.21
1 World-wide unity	361	84.74
4 Doctrinal unity (27)	361	84.74
7 Presence in most countries	359	84.27
3 Health message	355	83.33
17 Education for ministers	355	83.33
18 Evangelism and outreach	350	82.16
19 Unentered areas	344	80.75
6 EGW writings	342	80.28
15 Higher education	342	80.28
16 Extensive system	332	77.93
9 Dedicated lay members	331	77.70
12 Mission service for spiritual growth	330	77.46
27 Publishing	319	74.88
29 ADRA	317	74.41
24 Radio and TV programs	307	72.07
10 Educated professionals	306	71.83
25 Adventist World Radio	304	71.36
21 Common study guides	297	69.72
23 Healthcare facilities world-wide	276	64.79
20 Church planters	275	64.55
26 Satellite evangelism	275	64.55
11 Supportive ministries	245	57.51
13 International service	239	56.10
14 Job opportunities	162	38.03
28 The Adventist Review	90	21.13

Weaknesses

41 Loss of young people	349	81.92
40 No growth in secular societies	335	78.64
58 Bible study and prayer	334	78.40
31 Rapid growth where no finances	326	76.53
43 Poor retention	326	76.53
42 No stability programs	319	74.88
46 Cultural evangelistic materials	312	73.24
53 Isolationism	300	70.42
44 Decreasing youth in ministry	285	66.90
47 Lack of contextualized materials	271	63.62
32 Unclear use of offerings	267	62.68
33 Top heavy administration	267	62.68
45 Lack of books for youth	262	61.50
37 Lack of leadership training	261	61.27
39 No leaders for discipling	259	60.80
34 Leadership model	239	56.10
38 Few women in leadership	238	55.87
52 Illiteracy among members	237	55.63
51 Churches with narrow world view	235	55.16
55 Congregationalism	232	54.46

49 Church judgmental	231	54.23
54 Cultural segregation in churches	221	51.88
57 Intolerance for cultural diversity	219	51.41
50 Church legalistic in approach	217	50.94
48 No materials in many languages	216	50.70
36 Spirit of independence	213	50.00
35 Bad communication	202	47.42
56 Off-shoot movements	202	47.42

Opportunities

59 Openness to message	340	79.81
62 Technology communication	322	75.59
64 People in transition outreach	311	73.00
60 Radio outreach	306	71.83
61 New-people groups outreach	306	71.83
63 Materials in more languages	296	69.48
66 College&Universities outreach	289	67.84
67 Greater world awareness	280	65.73
68 Interaction with communities	276	64.79
65 Global view outreach	271	63.62
69 World service opportunities	252	59.15

Threats

78 Secularism stronger	332	77.93
77 Population growth faster	291	68.31
73 Increasing poverty worldwide	281	65.96
80 Nationalism threat	252	59.15
71 Challenges to EGW	250	58.69
70 Attacks on theology	242	56.81
76 Intolerance for religious freedom	233	54.69
72 Perception of church as a cult	212	49.77
79 Illiteracy growth	209	49.06
81 AIDS threat	198	46.48
75 World prejudice to Christianity	197	46.24
74 NA-centered church	193	45.31

MEANS OF QUESTIONS

QN	Question	Mean	Std. Dev.
Strengths			
2	Message of hope	4.61	0.74
5	Biblical basis for doctrines	4.60	0.70
30	Tithe-sharing plan	4.41	0.87
1	World-wide unity	4.39	0.89
4	Doctrinal unity (27)	4.37	0.92
8	A multi-cultural church	4.37	0.86
22	Guides for various age levels	4.35	0.92
18	Evangelism and outreach	4.33	0.89
7	Presence in most countries	4.30	0.89
6	EGW writings	4.26	0.97
3	Health message	4.25	0.83
9	Dedicated lay members	4.24	0.89
19	Unentered areas	4.24	0.92
17	Education for ministers	4.23	0.87
15	Higher education	4.22	0.92
16	Extensive system	4.11	0.95
12	Mission service for spiritual growth	4.09	0.91
29	ADRA	4.03	0.94
27	Publishing	4.03	0.98
21	Common study guides	4.02	1.14
25	Adventist World Radio	3.97	1.00
24	Radio and TV programs	3.96	1.01
10	Educated professionals	3.90	0.84
23	Healthcare facilities world-wide	3.84	1.03
28	The Adventist Review	3.83	1.01
20	Church planters	3.80	0.99
26	Satellite evangelism	3.75	1.11
11	Supportive ministries	3.67	1.01
13	International service	3.60	0.95
14	Job opportunities	3.20	1.08
Weaknesses			
41	Loss of young people	4.32	0.90
58	Bible study and prayer	4.28	0.93
40	No growth in secular societies	4.25	0.92
43	Poor retention	4.12	0.95
31	Rapid growth where no finances	4.11	0.97
42	No stability programs	4.03	0.87
46	Cultural evangelistic materials	3.98	0.97
53	Isolationism	3.96	0.95
44	Decreasing youth in ministry	3.83	1.11
32	Unclear use of offerings	3.82	0.98
33	Top heavy administration	3.77	1.07
47	Lack of contextualized materials	3.77	0.98
39	No leaders for discipling	3.77	0.99
45	Lack of books for youth	3.71	0.99

37 Lack of leadership training	3.70	1.05
38 Few women in leadership	3.60	1.16
52 Illiteracy among members	3.59	1.04
51 Churches with narrow world view	3.55	1.01
55 Congregationalism	3.55	1.12
54 Cultural segregation in churches	3.54	1.19
49 Church judgmental	3.53	1.10
34 Leadership model	3.52	1.10
48 No materials in many languages	3.52	1.12
50 Church legalistic in approach	3.51	1.09
36 Spirit of independence	3.47	1.13
57 Intolerance for cultural diversity	3.46	1.14
56 Off-shoot movements	3.42	1.14
35 Bad communication	3.36	1.12

Opportunities

59 Openness to message	4.19	0.92
62 Technology communication	4.07	0.94
61 New-people groups outreach	4.00	0.94
60 Radio outreach	4.00	1.06
64 People in transition outreach	4.00	0.91
63 Materials in more languages	3.89	1.04
66 College&Universities outreach	3.87	0.93
68 Interaction with communities	3.87	1.03
67 Greater world awareness	3.81	0.92
69 World service opportunities	3.75	0.95
65 Global view outreach	3.75	0.93

Threats

78 Secularism stronger	4.11	0.97
77 Population growth faster	3.95	1.06
73 Increasing poverty worldwide	3.83	1.03
70 Attacks on theology	3.65	1.15
80 Nationalism threat	3.64	1.17
71 Challenges to EGW	3.63	1.18
76 Intolerance for religious freedom	3.55	1.09
72 Perception of church as a cult	3.48	1.11
79 Illiteracy growth	3.44	1.04
81 AIDS threat	3.41	1.19
75 World prejudice to Christianity	3.36	1.06
74 NA-centered church	3.35	1.16

The numbers preceding each question are the numbers of each question as they appear in the questionnaire. The question itself is often abbreviated for space considerations. For the full wording of the question consult the copy of the questionnaire at the end of this report.

Strengths

The two items rated as most important strengths were "Doctrines seen by members as biblically based" and "The overall message of the church is one of hope." Both of these were rated high by over 90% of the respondents. A break of seven points occurs until the next set where eleven items were rated high by 80 to 85%. Chief among these were "A multi-cultural church," "Sabbath school study guides for various age levels," and "the Tithe-sharing plan."

Eight items were emphasized by 71 to 78%. Four more fell in the 60% range. Though lower, two items, "Lay members who operate supportive ministries" and "Service opportunities for international workers," were still rated as important or most important by over half of the respondents. Considerably less important was "Provides job opportunities for some members" at 38%.

An unfortunate typographical error in the survey resulted in "*The Adventist Review*" being rated as important by only 21%. The numbers of the choices were omitted so those filling out the survey had to write in the number rather than simply circle a printed number. Only 90 people out of the 426 who answered noticed this. The list of means reveals that the average rating on a five-point scale was 3.83, placing it in the twenty-fifth place rather than last.

Weaknesses

In general, weaknesses were not rated as serious to the extent that strengths were rated as important. Leading the way, "Great loss of young people to the church" was seen as crucial by 82%. Other items of concern to approximately three-fourths of the respondents were "Minimal growth in post-modern, secular, affluent societies," "Only 50% of membership involved in Bible study and prayer" (findings in world survey), "Limited financial resources in areas of rapid

church growth" (forecasting the future document), "Poor retention rates of new converts," and "Lack of programs of stability in new-growth areas.

The greatest perceived weakness 'Great loss of young people to the church' seems appropriate given the findings of the ten-year longitudinal study of youth retention in the North American Division that 40 to 50% of baptized teenagers leave the church or become inactive by the time they are in their mid-twenties. Apparently, other divisions are experiencing similar problems.

Only two items were considered serious by less than 50%--"Difficulty to communicate to church hierarchies" and "Off-shoot or fringe movements"-- each at 47%. Of some interest, given the history of recent struggles, "Few women in leadership" was rated a serious problem by 56% - placing 17th among the 28 items, ahead of such problems as "Growing spirit of Congregationalism," "Failure to produce materials in many languages," and "Spirit of independence without concern for the larger body."

Opportunities

All opportunities were rated "important" or "most important" by the majority of respondents. At the top of the list was "New openness to the message in many places" - rated high by 80%. Four others – "Wider access to technology for rapid communication," "People in transition more susceptible to the Gospel," "Reach closed areas through radio," and "Enter new-people groups" - were chosen as important by 72 to 76%.

"Unfilled service opportunities in the world" drew the fewest important ratings but still was so rated by 59%.

Threats

How serious are threats from the outside world? Of the 12 suggested possibilities, 78% rated "Strong press for materialism and secularism in the world" as most crucial." Another two-thirds saw "World population grows faster than the Adventist membership" "Increasing poverty worldwide" as especially serious.

Rated most serious by only a minority of respondents were "The general social turmoil caused by AID" (46%), "World prejudice to Christianity" (46%), and "Church viewed as a North American church" (45%).

Conclusion

World leaders tended to rate most strengths and opportunities as "important" or "most important" and most weaknesses and threats as "serious" or "most serious." Out of the 81 items covering all four categories, 72 of them were given top ratings by a majority of the respondents. This suggests that the world church has a very large agenda to engage. Yet in spite of the tendency to see most things as important, enough variation was discovered to allow the church to set priorities. The church faces large challenges in retaining its youth, speaking to the secular mind, dealing with population growth, and encouraging members to remain faithful by maintaining a rich devotional life.

THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH:
AN ANALYSIS OF STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND THREATS (SWOT)

Please rate the importance of the strengths and opportunities and the extent of the problem of the weaknesses and the threats on a scale of 1 to 5 as follows: 1 = not very important or not much of a concern; 5 = Most important or most crucial or greatest danger. Please circle the number.

Strengths *(relate to matters concerning resources and programs that are essentially **internal** to the church)*

Organization

  1. An organizational system that ensures world-wide unity 1 2 3 4 5

Message and doctrine

  2. The overall message of the church is one of hope 1 2 3 4 5
  3. Health message that promotes longer and healthier lives 1 2 3 4 5
  4. United in doctrine based on the 27 Fundamental Beliefs 1 2 3 4 5
  5. Doctrines seen by its members as biblically based 1 2 3 4 5
  6. Writings of Ellen White 1 2 3 4 5

Membership

  7. Has presence in most countries of the world 1 2 3 4 5
  8. A multi-cultural church 1 2 3 4 5
  9. Dedicated lay members 1 2 3 4 5
 10. A growing group of educated professionals 1 2 3 4 5
 11. Lay members who operate supportive ministries 1 2 3 4 5

Service Opportunities

 12. Mission service opportunities that benefit spiritual growth   .. 1 2 3 4 5
 13. Service opportunities for international workers 1 2 3 4 5
 14. Provides job opportunities for some members 1 2 3 4 5

Education

 15. A strong belief in higher education 1 2 3 4 5
 16   An extensive educational system 1 2 3 4 5

Ministry and Evangelism

 17. A comprehensive plan to educate ministers 1 2 3 4 5
 18. Strong in evangelism and outreach programs 1 2 3 4 5
 19. Global Mission initiative focused on unentered areas.............. 1 2 3 4 5
 20. Various types of church planters 1 2 3 4 5

Sabbath School

21. Common Sabbath school study guides world-wide 1   2   3   4   5

22. Sabbath school study guides for various age levels 1   2   3   4   5

Other Ministries

23. Healthcare facilities world-wide 1   2   3   4   5

24. Extensive system of radio and television programs 1   2   3   4   5

25. Adventist World Radio 1   2   3   4   5

26. Utilizes satellite evangelism 1   2   3   4   5

27. World-wide publishing program 1   2   3   4   5

28. The *Adventist Review* 1   2   3   4   5

29. Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) 1   2   3   4   5

Finance

30. Tithe-sharing plan 1   2   3   4   5

Weaknesses *(relate to matters concerning resources and programs that are essentially **internal** to the church)*

Finance

31. Limited financial resources in areas of rapid
    church growth 1   2   3   4   5

32. Members poorly informed how offerings are used 1   2   3   4   5

Organization/ Leadership

33. Top heavy administration 1   2   3   4   5

34. Lack of clearly defined church leadership model 1   2   3   4   5

35. Difficulty to communicate to church hierarchies 1   2   3   4   5

36. Spirit of independence without concern for the larger body 1   2   3   4   5

37. Lack of leadership training 1   2   3   4   5

38. Few women in leadership 1   2   3   4   5

39. Lack of leadership in nurturing/discipleship programs 1   2   3   4   5

Growth

40. Minimal growth in post-modern, secular, affluent societies 1   2   3   4   5

41. Great loss of young people to the church 1   2   3   4   5

42. Lack of programs of stability in new-growth areas 1   2   3   4   5

43. Poor retention rates of new converts 1   2   3   4   5

Resources: Personnel

44. Declining number of Adventist youth preparing
for the ministry 1   2   3   4   5

Resources: Material

45. Lack of literature for young people 1   2   3   4   5
46. Need for culturally adapted evangelistic materials 1   2   3   4   5
47. Lack of printed, contextualized materials 1   2   3   4   5
48. Failure to produce materials in many languages 1   2   3   4   5

Perception

49. Church perceived as judgmental 1   2   3   4   5
50. Perception of the church as legalistic in its approach 1   2   3   4   5
51. Smaller churches without a more expansive world view 1   2   3   4   5

Membership

52. High percentage of member illiteracy
in developing countries 1   2   3   4   5
53. A tendency to group together and not permeate society 1   2   3   4   5
54. Too much cultural segregation in Adventist churches 1   2   3   4   5
55. Growing spirit of congregationalism 1   2   3   4   5
56. Off-shoot or fringe movements 1   2   3   4   5
57. Low level of tolerance for cultural diversity 1   2   3   4   5

Personal Devotion

58. Only 50% of membership involved
in Bible study and prayer 1   2   3   4   5

Opportunities *(these are **external** opportunities confronting the church)*

Growth

59. New openness to the message in many places 1   2   3   4   5
60. Reach closed areas through radio 1   2   3   4   5
61. Enter new-people groups 1   2   3   4   5
62. Wider access to technology for rapid communication 1   2   3   4   5
63. Freedom to produce materials in more languages 1   2   3   4   5
64. People in transition more susceptible to the gospel 1   2   3   4   5
65. People with global view more susceptible
to the gospel 1   2   3   4   5
66. Youth in college and universities are open to change. 1   2   3   4   5

Awareness/Community

67. Greater awareness of world to the work of the church............. 1   2   3   4   5

68. Interaction with local communities 1   2   3   4   5

Service

69.   Unfilled service opportunities in the world. 1   2   3   4   5

Threats   *(these are **external** threats confronting the church)*

Message

70. Attacks on theology; e.g., creation account, sanctuary 1   2   3   4   5

71. Challenges to the inspiration of Ellen White.......................... 1   2   3   4   5

72. Church is viewed as a cult in some countries 1   2   3   4   5

Finance

73. Increasing poverty worldwide 1   2   3   4   5

Organization

74. Church viewed as a North American church........................... 1   2   3   4   5

Religious Freedom

75. World prejudice to Christianity 1   2   3   4   5

76. Decrease in tolerance for religious freedom............................ 1   2   3   4   5

Growth

77. World population grows faster than the
Adventist membership... 1   2   3   4   5

78. Strong press for materialism and
secularism in the world... 1   2   3   4   5

79. Increasing illiteracy worldwide 1   2   3   4   5

80. National and ethnic rivalries fracturing unity......................... 1   2   3   4   5

81. The general social turmoil caused by AIDS............................. 1   2   3   4   5